

Here to Help; One Thing You Can Do to Reduce Your Environmental Footprint

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Byline: By JOHN SCHWARTZ, LISA FRIEDMAN and TIK ROOT

Body

Welcome to the Climate Fwd: newsletter. The New York Times climate team emails readers once a week with stories and insights about climate change. Sign up here to get it in your inbox.

By John Schwartz

Hey there, everybody!

Some news drove up just as we were writing to you today. Coral Davenport reports that the White House is planning to establish a commission that will advise President Trump on "how a changing climate could affect the security of the United States." Is that a change of heart from a president who has denied the science of climate change?

Perhaps not. A member of the panel will be William Happer, a Princeton physicist who asserts that carbon dioxide, a primary driver of global warming, is good for the planet. We've written before about how he was entangled in a sting operation by the environmental group Greenpeace.

Coral had another story since our last newsletter: The Environmental Protection Agency announced it would start working on a long-awaited plan to set national drinking-water limits for two harmful chemicals, known as PFASs, that scientists have linked to cancer, low infant birth weight and other health issues.

The agency said it would begin the work by the end of the year. To critics like Senator Tom Carper, Democrat of Delaware, that sounds like foot-dragging. "While E.P.A. acts with the utmost urgency to repeal regulations," he said, "the agency ambles with complacency when it comes to taking real steps to protect the water we drink and the air we breathe." Of course, we've written quite a bit about the administration's regulatory rollbacks and their effects.

Let's get out of Washington and head to Sweden, where a young woman is skipping school to shame her government into doing more to fight climate change. If you missed it, take a look at Somini Sengupta's profile of Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old activist. It's a fascinating piece that shows her wry, blunt views on climate inaction.

"It's sometimes annoying when people say, 'Oh you children, you young people are the hope. You will save the world,'" Greta told Somini. "I think it would be helpful if you could help us just a little bit."

Finally, one of the first scientists to warn the world about climate change died on Monday. Wallace Broecker popularized the term "global warming," and in 1975 published a paper whose title asked, "Climatic Change: Are We

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on the Brink of a Pronounced Global Warming?" I wrote the obituary for the man who was fond of saying, "The climate system is an angry beast and we are poking it with sticks."

A president, a comedian and a climate podcast

By Lisa Friedman

It may seem unusual for a former leader of a nation to team up with a comedian to bring a message about climate change to the masses. But that's what Mary Robinson, a former president of Ireland, and Maeve Higgins, a stand-up comedian and writer from Ireland now living in New York, have been doing for the past year with their podcast about climate justice called "Mothers of Invention."

The two have reunited for a second season, which began Tuesday. "Mothers of Invention" attracted more than 70,000 subscribers in its first season, which focused on introducing listeners to the driving causes of rising global temperatures. This year the podcast takes a deeper look at people around the world, particularly women, who are influencing the climate debate. "Climate change is a man-made problem that requires a feminist solution" is the show's tagline.

Ms. Robinson, who also leads The Mary Robinson Foundation-Climate Justice, has worked for many years to draw attention to links between rising emissions and inequality. On the show, she tends to play the straight woman and sometimes good-natured scold to the naïve and wisecracking Ms. Higgins, who said she knew little about climate issues before working on the podcast.

"It's very Irish," Ms. Higgins told me at a recent taping in New York. "It's actually the way Irish people show affection, is what I tell myself. When Mary says something like, 'And then we have Maeve over here, a pretty slow learner,' I'm like, 'She likes me!'"

The unlikely pair became a team after Ms. Robinson, who recently published a book on climate justice, expressed a desire to produce a documentary. Her team suggested a podcast instead.

"My immediate question was, what's a podcast? I'm not that generation," Ms. Robinson, 74, recalled.

In many ways the early episodes follow Ms. Higgins's learning curve on climate change, like when she takes listeners on a journey across her multiple conversations with customer service at Chase Bank in an effort to divest her \$3,000 in savings from institutions that support fossil-fuel investments. "I hope I bring a curiosity and a much-needed levity," Ms. Higgins told me.

Ms. Robinson thinks she does. "People learn about climate change through Maeve's questions and her sense of humor," she said.

Ms. Robinson said the podcast helped her appreciate the importance of humor in communicating serious issues like the threat of planetary destabilization. (Ms. Robinson is also a longtime, widely respected human rights campaigner, though she recently drew negative attention when she was accused of covering for Dubai's mistreatment of a daughter of the ruling sheikh. She has said her assessment of the situation was "in good faith.")

The podcast features guests like Alexandria Villasenor, a 13-year-old who skips school on Fridays to protest for climate action in front of the United Nations, and Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, an indigenous leader from a pastoralist community in Chad who runs an organization focused on human rights and environmental protection.

So what's a feminist approach to climate change? Ms. Robinson calls it a "progressive, equality-based solution." But, she said, men are in fact allowed on the podcast -- sometimes.

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One thing you can do: Think dairy

By Tik Root

We've known for a while that many animal products have an outsized environmental footprint. But which ones have the most impact?

It might not be news to you that the world's beef production creates the most planet-warming emissions over all. But the next item on the list, according to one study, may be more surprising: dairy products.

"So much of the discourse around environmental impact of food is around meat," said Helen Harwatt, a policy fellow at the Animal Law & Policy Program at Harvard Law School, who published a study last year in the journal *Climate Policy*.

She had expected pork or chicken to be second to beef. But by her calculations, the production of dairy products -- including milk, cheese, ice cream and yogurt -- contributes about 3.6 percent of global planet-warming emissions each year. Her research focused on how policies can encourage shifts to plant proteins from animal proteins.

"It does really have a huge impact," Ms. Harwatt said, though she acknowledged that "a wholesale shift might not be practical for everyone." Rather, she suggested that people look for "low-hanging fruit or baby steps."

Alternative milks are chief among potential substitutes. From soy milk to oat milk; there's no shortage of plant-based options. Cynthia Sass, a nutritionist, pointed people to "pea milk and yogurt, made from yellow split peas."

There are now a plethora of replacements for other common dairy products as well, including cheese and ice cream. And, if you want to get even more creative, Ms. Sass recommended experimenting with pulses, which refers to beans, lentils, peas and chickpeas. Chickpea flour, for example, can be used to make a creamy sauce. And hummus can replace a dairy-based dip at your next party.

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This is a more complete version of the story than the one that appeared in print.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/climate/climate-fwd-dairy-substitutes.html>

Graphic

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